

60 U07 Nolan at Balaklava Part X : Lord Cardigan and Captain Nolan : A Surprising Connection
by Dr Douglas Austin U 07

Further to my long-term interest in the events and personalities of the Battle of Balaklava, I refer to Edward H. Nolan's "*The History of the War against Russia Illustrated*", Virtue, London. (1857) - published shortly after the war. In this extract from pp 546-547 of Volume I (Chapter. XLI), I emphasise some key points:-

"...The author of these pages has good authority for saying that the noble lord was obliged to place his sword before some of those gallant men to keep them in their proper places, so eager were they for the formidable encounter. Before, however, the grand crash of the charge was felt, or filled the spectators with astonishment and awe, poor Nolan paid the penalty of his own urgency with his life. Many various accounts have been given of the way he fell. He has been generally represented as leading the brigade when he received his death-blow. Lord Cardigan has denied this, and stated that Nolan was not leading the brigade, but a considerable distance on the general's right, and in advance. In this case both accounts are true. There is no doubt that the intrepid horseman was far in advance, and determined to keep the lead until his sword met the enemy, but he fell before the actual charge commenced, and while (just as Lord Cardigan represented) his horse was prancing about. At the moment of his fall he had just waved his sword, and given a cheer, when the fatal blow performed its mission. In several of the published accounts, Lord Cardigan is represented as detracting from Captain Nolan's merit in the statements he gave of the position of that officer when he fell. We are in a condition to positively refute that calumny. So far from Lord Cardigan wishing to depreciate Captain Nolan, he has vindicated his memory; and, when living, showed his confidence and respect by offering to place him upon his own staff. The writer of this narrative has these facts from the lips of the noble earl himself, who could have no motive, unless it were a personal courtesy, in deviating from the sternest matter of truth in the case. The fall of this fine officer has been described as caused by a shell, which killed him on the spot. The true occasion of his untimely end was a fragment of a shell, which entered his breast. The shell had fallen midway between the spot where Lord Cardigan rode and that where the uneasy steed of Captain Nolan, sympathising with its rider, seemed with joy to anticipate the charge. When Captain Nolan was struck his sword dropped, and the reins fell from his hand. The horse, following the instincts generally shown on such occasions, turned from the battle. The brigade now coming up fast, opened to let him pass. He immediately threw up his arms with an expressive cry, as if dissuading them from their course. This he repeated as the second line opened to make way for him, and then fell from his horse. It was universally supposed by those of the brigade who survived, that in riding so far to the front his quick eye perceived the impregnable position of the enemy, and his imploring gestures were intended to stop the cavalry from their self-immolating career. It is probable that the proud soldier dropped dead from his horse; for the general by whom that handful of men was so bravely led into the unequal struggle told the writer that, immediately on retiring from the charge, he saw the captain lying dead in a hollow, where he had fallen..."

The text above is nicely consistent with the evidence in my series that Nolan ordered at least the 17th Lancers to "Threes right!" - towards the Causeway Heights and towards the South Valley. Once there, they could have prevented the removal of British guns from Redoubts 3, 2 and 1 (Canrobert's Hill) - thereby complying with Raglan's fatal 4th Order. I note that **"he fell before the actual charge commenced."** The text clearly derives **directly from Cardigan in person** and I see no reason to discount it. Cardigan's statement of Nolan's position at the moment of his death accords well with other evidence, such as Surgeon Cattell's diagram (loaned to Alexander Kinglake) and which I published in *This Journal*, "Nolan at Balaklava : Part V, 26(4), 14-22, 2009).

More details of Nolan's fate occur in the "*Corrected Narrative*", written by John Elijah Blunt (Lucan's civilian interpreter) in Appendix J4 of my CWRS SP 33 '*Blunt Speaking*', 2006). In that, he stated:-

"I only saw the beginning of the charge and could distinguish Lord Cardigan and Captain Nolan, at the head of the first Regiment [*17th Lancers*]...When the firing from the Fedoukhine heights was thus suppressed and I saw men of the Light Brigade, some of them wounded and unhorsed, returning from the Charge, I left the redoubt [*No 5*] and walked down the hill towards them. On my way I met some Guardsmen who had just carried from the field the body of an Officer and on approaching them I at once recognised the body as that of Captain Nolan. His face was almost black, and his chest was lacerated and covered with blood. His death must have been instantaneous and caused, as I afterwards heard, by a shell bursting over or near him.¹ While I was looking at the body, H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge, passing by with some of his Staff stopped and asked 'Who is that?' I replied 'Captain Nolan, Your Royal Highness'. He rode on exclaiming 'Poor Nolan! Poor Nolan!'"

Poor Nolan, indeed! He was a general favourite at Head Quarters; and was considered a Cavalry authority of great experience, having served in the Austro-Hungarian Army and also distinguished himself in India. ² But, during his occasional visits to our camp at Balaklava, he used to speak very disparagingly of Lord Lucan as a Cavalry General. On one occasion I heard him remark to Major McMahon, A.Q.M.G. that had he (Nolan) commanded the Light Brigade at Alma, he would have pursued the Russians to the very gates of Sebastopol! His Lordship, however, did pursue the retreating Russians with some of his Squadrons, and while making some prisoners, he was recalled by Lord Raglan. I was near Lord Lucan when the recall order was delivered to him and witnessed his vexation at having to give up the pursuit. I should here mention the fact that Captain Nolan was one of the first, if not the first, victim of the charge of the Noble Six Hundred: when Lord Cardigan ordered the Brigade to advance, Captain Nolan bravely placed himself at the head of the leading Squadron ³ and brandishing his sword, cheered on the men to the charge. ⁴ Almost immediately after the Russian batteries opened fire, Captain Nolan was seen galloping to the rear and some of the men of the Squadron, ignorant at the time that he had been instantaneously killed by the splinters of a shell bursting over him, suspected that he was attempting to escape! ⁵ His horse in the meantime becoming very excited by the bursting shells, and no longer under control, galloped to the rear carrying its gallant master's body, which at last fell from the saddle in the vicinity of the spot I saw it in charge of some Guardsmen..."

From the National Army Museum, Chelsea, I have acquired a copy of a most interesting document which fits well with Edward Nolan's text above:- "**So far from Lord Cardigan wishing to depreciate Captain Nolan, he has vindicated his memory; and, when living, showed his confidence and respect by offering to place him upon his own staff.**"

NAM Chelsea: Ref:- Codrington Inherited Papers : 6807/377-1-Bundle 2 - date: Jul-Oct 1854 : 23 Oct Regarding the requests of Lt Magnell [Macneill], 3rd Foot & Capt Nolan, 15 Hussars to be attached to one of the Cavalry Regts.

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Horse Guards.
23 October 1854.

My Lord,

I have had the honor to lay before The General Commanding-in-Chief your Lordship's letters of the 1st and 3rd Instant, the first forwarding, for the favourable consideration of Viscount Hardinge, an application from Lieutenant Macneil ⁶ of the 3rd Foot to be appointed to one of the Regiments of Cavalry serving in the Army under your Lordship's Command, the other forwarding a

similar application from Captain Nolan on the Half Pay of the 15th Hussars and Aide-de-Camp to Brigadier General Airey to be brought on the Full Pay of one of those Regiments.

Viscount Hardinge desires me in reply to express the satisfaction it would afford him to give effect to the application of Officers of whom your Lordship entertains so favourable an opinion; but he apprehends there must be a great difficulty in these cases, as, in the event of a vacancy occurring in a Regiment employed on such a service as that in which the Army under your Lordship's command is engaged, he would be very unwilling not to recommend the Senior of the next Rank for promotion, unless in some case in which you should think it ought not to be given in that manner and should communicate that opinion to him.

Viscount Hardinge can therefore only express his disposition to be of service to these Officers if a fair opportunity should offer.

I have the honor to be

My Lord,
Your Lordship's most obedient
humble Servant.
C. Yorke

Raglan has scrawled a two-word note in the margin thus:-



Sadly, the first word cannot be deciphered, but the second appears to read "*demand*", followed by the initial "*R*". (Suggestions have included "*infantile*" and "*dismissed*"...) Before this unencouraging advice from Horse Guards, I take it that Raglan was in accord with Macneill and Nolan's applications for transfer to one of the Cavalry regiments. These requests could only have been placed with the approval of commanding officers - for Nolan that would have been QMG Richard Airey and Cardigan. How ironic that Nolan, after gaining high-level favour, missed his chance to serve in the Cavalry - only to be **falsely** discredited by Raglan and **falsely** castigated by many as the prime author of a British military debacle!

Acknowledgement: I thank the National Army Museum, Chelsea, for permission to transcribe and publish this letter.

- 1 It appears that Nolan's body was locked in an immediate cadaveric spasm, with his sword raised, at the moment of his death. His body was described elsewhere as 'an ugly corpse'.
- 2 Nolan was well-placed in India, but was never in combat there.
- 3 This may mean the 'Squadron of Direction' - which was the right-hand squadron of the 17th Lancers, under Captain White.
- 4 It is not clear that Blunt actually witnessed this incident, which is corroborated in writing by Calthorpe and others and by the wording on Nolan's Memorial (stolen from Holy Trinity Church, Maidstone in 1996 - and since replaced by a handsome public monument).
- 5 To my knowledge, this is the ONLY record of this assumption.
- 6 For "*MacNeil*" read "*MacNeill*". He did indeed join the 13th Light Dragoons.